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ANCIENT SCANDINAVIANS:

THEIR MARITIME EXPEDITIONS,
THEIR DISCOVERIES, AND THEIR RELIGION.

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BY PROFESSOR PAUL C. SINDING,

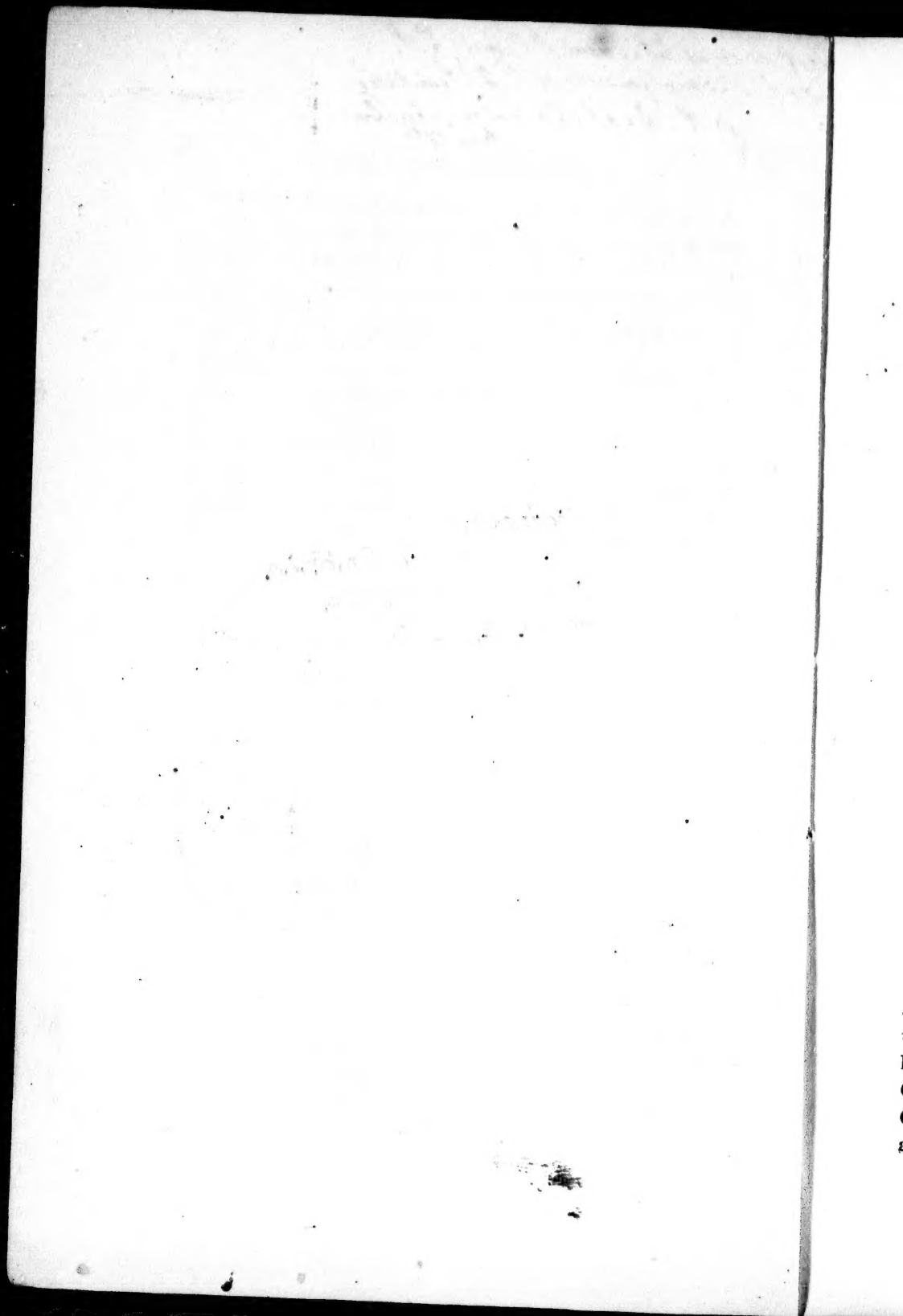
OF COPENHAGEN, DENMARK,
COR. MEM. OF QUEBEC LIT. AND HIST. SOC.



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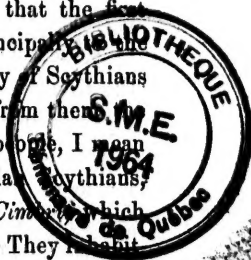


THE ANCIENT SCANDINAVIANS: THEIR MARITIME EXPEDITIONS, THEIR DIS- COVERIES, AND THEIR RELIGION.

By PROFESSOR PAUL C. SINDING, OF COPENHAGEN, DENMARK,
COR. MEM. OF QUERECQ LIT. AND HIST. SOC.

(Read before the Society, 5th April, 1865.)

History has scarcely recorded the annals of a people who have occasioned greater, more sudden, or more numerous revolutions in Europe than the Scandinavians, the Danes, Norwegians and Swedes, or whose antiquities, at the same time, are so little known. At what period of time these three ancient kingdoms began to be inhabited, historians have never been able to ascertain with any full degree of certainty. But it is very probable that the first Danes, Norwegians and Swedes, who belonged principally to the Gothic tribe, were, like the Teutonic nations, a colony of Scythians who dwelt round about the Black Sea, and that from thence the first colonies were sent into Denmark. From this people, I mean that branch of them which was called the Cimmeric Scythians, they, in all probability, inherited the name of *Cimmerians*, which name they bore long before they got that of Danes. They inhabited, a long time before the nativity of Christ, the country that had from them the name of the *Cimbrica Chersonesus* or *Cimbric Peninsula*, which now is called Jutland, and is a part of the Danish monarchy. But all that passed in Denmark before Christ would be entire darkness to us, if the famous expedition of the Cimbri and Teutons, 150 years before Christ, into Italy, had not drawn upon them the attention of a people who enjoyed the advantage of having historians. More than 300,000 men, consisting both of Cimbri and Teutones, left their country, and roamed wildly about in Germany, killing and plundering wherever they went. The Gauls also were overwhelmed with this torrent, whose course was then



for quite a long time, marked by the most horrible desolation ; and when at length it was reported in Rome that they were disposed to pass into Italy, the consternation there became general. Upon entering Italy they sent an embassy to the Romans to offer them their services, upon condition that they would give them land to cultivate. The Senate, unwilling to enter into any kind of accommodation with such ruthless enemies, returned a direct refusal to their request. The Cimbri and Teutones now resolved to take by force what they could not gain by entreaty, attacked the Roman provinces in Southern Germany, and defeated the Romans five times in succession with immense slaughter. The Teutones (the Germans) now separated themselves from the Cimbri, the Teutones going into Spain, the Cimbri into France. In this melancholy conjuncture the Romans appointed the great and brave Marius commander-in-chief, and he saved Rome. He marched into France, and pitched his camp opposite the Teutones, who had now returned from Spain. In the camp of the Teutones were heard continued howlings like those of savage beasts, so hideous, that the Romans, and even their general himself, could not but testify to their horror. At length the battle commenced with great impetuosity, when finally the victory declared itself entirely in favour of the Romans. This victory, Marius, the Roman general, gained at Aquæ Sextiæ in Southern France, in the year 102 B.C., and the Roman historians relate that the inhabitants of Marseilles made inclosures for their gardens and vineyards with the bones of the slaughtered Teutones, and that the soil thereabout was so much fattened that its increase of produce was prodigious. But the Cimbri (the Danes) who had separated themselves from the Teutones, still threatened Rome. Marius was charged to raise a new army with the utmost speed, and to go and engage them. The Cimbri sent a message a second time to demand an allotment of land, which demand again met with an unconditional refusal. Then the Cimbri prepared immediately for battle, and their General approached the Roman camp to agree with Marius on a day and place of action. Marius announced that although it was

not the custom of the Romans to consult their enemies on this subject, he would, however, oblige them, and appointed the next day but one, and the plain of Verceil, in Northern Italy, for the hostile meeting. The Cimbri were, after a most desperate engagement, routed, and 120,000 of this fierce and valiant nation were mowed down. This battle was fought in the year 101 before Christ, and put an end to their invasion of Rome. I do not pretend to decide whether the first inhabitants of the three Scandinavian countries were, all of them, without any mixture, Cimbri and Teutones; for although it appears probable with regard to Denmark, it cannot be denied that the *Finns* and *Laplanders* anciently possessed a much more considerable part of Scandinavia than they do at present, and were formerly spread over the southern parts of Norway and Sweden, whence in process of time they have been driven out by new colonies of Scythians, and banished amongst the northern rocks, in like manner as the ancient inhabitants of Britain have been dispossessed by the Saxons of the greatest and most pleasant part of their island, and forced to conceal themselves amongst the mountains of Wales, where to this day they retain, as we know, their peculiar language. But to return to Denmark. Up to this very year, 101 B. C., when the Cimbri were, as we have heard, defeated by Marius, and even until 250 years after Christ, the Danes were called Cimbri. In Christ's time Frode Fredegod (Pacific) is said to have been king of Denmark. The rulers of that time, however, were not called kings, but Drosts, that is to say, generals; and *Rig*, ruler of Skane, a province in the southern part of Sweden, adopted first the title of king. A new generation begins with *Dan Mykillati* (the Splendid), whom all historians consider the founder of the country called Denmark, 250 A.D. Some have from him derived the name Denmark, but it is more probable that it has originated from the word *Dan*, denoting *low* or *flat*, and from *Mark*, denoting *overgrown with wood*,—the name Denmark thus signifying a flat land overgrown with wood. About 150 years before the time of Dan Mykillati lived *Nor*, a prince from Finnland. He went through

Lapland into Norway, conquering most of this country. All that he subdued he called Norway, and this country has always since borne this name.

But how formidable soever, as we have seen, the ancient Scandinavians were by land to most of the inhabitants of Europe, it must yet be allowed that their maritime expeditions occasioned still more destructive ravages. We cannot read the history of the eighth, ninth and tenth centuries without observing with surprise the ocean covered with their vessels. During the space of two hundred years, they almost incessantly ravaged England, often invaded Scotland and Ireland, and made incursions on the coasts of Livonia and Pomerania. Charlemagne is known to have shed tears on hearing that these barbarians had, on some occasion, defied his name, and he foresaw what his people would suffer from their martial spirit under his successors. And his fear was well grounded. They soon spread like a devouring flame over Lower Saxony, Holland, Flanders, and the banks of the Rhine, and wherever they went, they went as lords and rulers. They pillaged and burnt Paris, Bordeaux, Angoulême, and many other cities. In short, they ruined France, levied immense tribute on its monarchs, and burnt the palace of Charlemagne at Aix-la-Chapelle. They often carried their arms into Spain, and in the year 844, a band of these sea-rovers attacked Sevilla, which they soon made themselves masters of. The better to account for that strange facility with which the Scandinavians so long plundered, and so frequently conquered the Anglo-Saxons and the French, we must remark that their cruelty, which gave no quarter, had impressed these nations with such terror, that they were half vanquished at their very appearance. The profession of piracy was so far from appearing disgraceful to them, that it was in their eyes the certain way to honors and fortune. Hence it is that in the ancient chronicles, more than one hero boasts of being the most renowned pirate in the North, and that often the sons of the great lords and kings made voyages in their youth, in order to make themselves illustrious. This is what we see happen very frequently after

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Harold Hairfair had once made himself master of all Norway, which before his time was divided into several petty states. This Harold made a vow neither to comb nor cut his hair until he had subdued the whole of Norway, and as it took him several years to do this, it grew so long and thick that he was called Harold the Hermit. Having finally accomplished the conquest of all Norway, he took a bath, combed and trimmed his hair. His appearance was so much changed for the better by these cleansing operations, that he was given the surname: Hairfair. The vessels of these Scandinavian pirates were always well provided with offensive weapons, such as stones, slings and arrows, which they considered their dearest property, and therefore we must not be surprised that they should take it into their heads almost to worship their instruments of war, without which their passion for conquest could not have been gratified. The respect they had for their weapons made them almost swear by instruments so valuable, as being the most sacred things they knew. It is therefore with peculiar propriety that Shakspeare makes Hamlet, his Prince of Denmark, call upon his companions to swear upon his sword,—

“Come hither, gentlemen,
And lay your hands upon my sword:
Never to speak of this that you have heard
Swear by my sword.”

The soldiers engaged themselves by an oath of this kind, not to flee though their enemies should be superior in number, and they often formed amongst themselves a kind of society or confraternity in which the several members engaged, at the expense of their own lives, to avenge the death of their associates, provided it were honorable and violent. Accordingly, we never find any amongst these people guilty of cowardice, the mere suspicion of that vice being always attended with universal contempt. A man, who had lost his buckler or who had received a wound behind, could never more appear in public. In the history of England we therefore see a famous Norwegian captain, who had sent his son to attack a province in Scotland, ask with great coolness those who brought the intelligence of his son's death, whether his son

had received his wounds behind or before. The messengers telling him that his son was wounded before, the father cried out : " Then I have every reason to rejoice, for any other death would have been disgraceful both to my son and myself."

• But the mind of the Scandinavians was not only bent on piracy and robbery ; they directed also their attention to discoveries in the North and in the far West. The Faroe Isles had been discovered at the latter end of the ninth century, by some Scandinavian pirates, and soon after this, Iceland was colonized by the Norwegians, where a flourishing republic was established, in which the old Danish or old northern language was preserved unchanged for centuries, and Iceland became the cradle of a northern historical literature of immense value. The Icelandic chronicles also relate that the Northmen discovered a great country to the west of Ireland, and it seems very clear that they made their way to Greenland in the end of the tenth century, and they are thus the first discoverers of America. The settlement made in Greenland seems to have been very prosperous. They had bishops and priests from Europe, and paid the Pope an annual tribute. But the art of navigation must have been at a very low pitch, for the voyage from Greenland to Iceland and Norway and back again, consumed five years, and upon one occasion, the government of Norway did not hear of the death of the Bishop of Greenland until six years after it had occurred. But the same age which saw the bearded sea-kings and vikings of the North discovering Iceland and Greenland, beheld them also in New England, in the States of Massachusetts and Rhode Island, and with extraordinary energy. The very first of the old documents to which I briefly will request the attention of my hearers, is the Saga of *Bjarne Herjulfson*. On a voyage from Iceland to Greenland, in the year 986, this man was driven far out to sea, towards the South-west, and for the first time beheld the coasts of the American land, afterwards visited by his countrymen. In order to examine these countries more minutely, Leif the Fortunate purchased Bjarn's vessel, and undertook a voyage thither in the year 1000. With thirty-five hardy

men he landed on the shores described by Bjarne, detailed the character of these lands more exactly, and named them according to their appearance. Helluland (Newfoundland) was so called from its flat stones, the word Hellu signifying a flat stone; Markland (Nova Scotia), from its woods, the word Markland signifying woodland; and Vineland (New England), from its vines. A German, named Tyrker, who accompanied Leif on this voyage, was the man who found the wild vines which he recognized from having seen them in his own land, and he gave the country the name of Vineland from this circumstance. But amongst the most interesting of the old documents at this period, is that of *Thorfinn*. He was an Icelandic merchant, whose genealogy is carried back in the old northern annals to Danish, Norwegian, Scottish and Irish ancestors, some of them even of royal blood. In the year 1006 this chief, on a merchant voyage, visited Greenland, when he married a woman by the name of Gudrid. Accompanied by her and a crew of 160 men, he repaired to Vineland (New England), where he remained for three years, and had many communications with the aborigines. Here his wife, Gudrid, bore him a son, called Snorre, who was the very first child of European parents born in America, and this child became the founder of an illustrious family in Iceland, which gave that island several of its first bishops. The notices given by this illustrious navigator, Thorfinn, respecting the climate, the soil and the productions of New England, are very characteristic, and correspond with the language of less questionable narrators five hundred years later. Upon the whole, it is the total result of the nautical, geographical and astronomical evidences in the original documents, which places the location of the countries discovered beyond all doubt. The number of days' sail between the several newly-found lands, the striking description of the coasts, especially the white sand-banks of Nova Scotia and the long branches of a peculiar appearance on Cape Cod, are not to be mistaken, and cannot but open our eyes with interest. In addition hereto we have the astronomical remark, that the shortest day in Vineland (New England) was

nine hours long, which fixes the latitude of $41^{\circ} 24' 10''$, or just that of the promontories, which limit the entrances to Mount Hope Bay, in the district around which the old Northmen had their head establishment. Thus the claim that the Northmen were the very first discoverers of America seems to be placed on good foundation, and it is embodied in the learned work of Dr. C. C. Rafn of Copenhagen, "*Antiquitates Americanæ*." However, this does not, I may be allowed to remark, lessen the great merits of the immortal Columbus, nor have I referred to it for this purpose; but we ought, nevertheless, not to forget that Columbus visited the Danish island, Iceland, in the year 1477, had access to the archives there, and must doubtless have heard of the former discoveries of the northern roving sea-kings.

But before concluding, I must briefly touch the religion professed in Scandinavia before the introduction of Christianity, or what we call the Scandinavian mythology, a subject replete with interest to all intelligent people. A celebrated tradition, confirmed by the poems of all the northern nations, by their chronicles or sagas, by their institutions and customs, some of which subsist to this very day, informs us that an extraordinary person named *Odin* formerly reigned in the North, that he made great changes in the government, manners and religion of these countries, that he enjoyed there great authority, and had even divine honors paid him. His true name was *Siggo*, but he assumed that of *Odin*, who was the Supreme God amongst the Gothic and Teutonic nations. This *Odin*, who invaded Scandinavia seventy years before Christ, is, as known almost to everybody, the founder of a new religion, which we call the Scandinavian mythology, having undoubtedly some affinity to the old Scythian religion, from the borders of which country he probably came,—I mean from the region between the Black and the Caspian Sea. A space of seven or eight years intervened between the time of *Odin* and the conversion of Denmark, Norway and Sweden to Christianity. The motive of the worship introduced by *Odin* had a great resemblance to the Christian ideas, containing much of the spirit of

obedience for which St. Paul praises the heathen that are without the law, but do by nature the things contained in the law, showing the works of the law written in their hearts. It was namely the fear of a divinity irritated by the sins of men, but who, at the same time, was merciful, and capable of being appeased by prayer and repentance. To serve this divinity by sacrifice, to do no wrong to others, and to be brave and intrepid in themselves, were the moral consequences. Lastly, the belief in a future state completed the whole building. Cruel tortures were there reserved for such as despised those fundamental precepts of morality, and pleasures without number awaited every valiant man. Odin passed among the inhabitants for the *God of War*. No object, in their opinion, could be more worthy his attention. Hence he is called in the Icelandic chronicles, "The terrible and severe god, the father of slaughter." The warriors who went to battle made a vow to send him a certain number of souls; these souls were Odin's right; he received them in Hlidskjalf, the name of his palace, where he treated them with an inspiring beverage, more inspiring, say the old Sagas, than ever after can be quaffed. The assistance of Odin was implored in every war, and it was believed that he often descended himself to intermix in the conflict in order to inspire the combatants with courage. But this terrible divinity, who took such pleasure in shedding the blood of men, was, at the same time, according to the old chronicles, their father. He had created the heavens, the air, and before the heavens and the earth came into existence, he lived already with the giants, that is to say, he was eternal. These ideas, however, were not peculiar to Scandinavia. The Germans, for instance, attributed likewise to the Supreme Being a superintendency over war. There remain, up to this very day, some traces of the worship paid to Odin in the name given by the people of the North and of England to the fourth day of the week, which was consecrated to him. It is called by a name signifying Odin's day. In Old Norse, *Odinsdag*; in Swedish and Danish, *Onsdag*; in Anglo-Saxon, *Wodenesday*; in Dutch, *Woensdag*; and in English, *Wednesday*.

Oden was, as we have heard, the principal god amongst the Scandinavians, but they had also goddesses, amongst whom *Frigga*, the wife of Odin, was the principal. Another celebrated goddess was *Freia*. She was the goddess of love, and plays a prominent part in the northern mythology. She was addressed in order to obtain happy marriages and easy childbirths. The celebrated Iceland poem, called the Edda, styles her the most favorable of the goddesses, but she went to war as well as Odin, and divided with him the souls of the slain. It appears to have been the general idea that she was the same as Venus of the Romans, since the sixth day of the week, which was consecrated to her under the name of Freya's day, was rendered into Latin, "*Dies Veneris*," or Venus's day; in Danish, *Fredag*; in German, *Freitag*; in Anglo-Saxon, *Frigedag*; in English afterwards, *Friday*. The second principal god of the ancient Scandinavians was *Thor*, whom the Gothic and Teutonic nations valued about as highly as Odin who was considered his father, and the Scandinavians called him the bravest of the sons of Odin. He always carried a mallet or hammer, which he grasps with gauntlets of iron, and he was further possessed of a girdle which had the power of renewing his strength as often as it was needful. He was considered the defender of the gods, and the god of thunder and lightning. To him the fifth day of the week was consecrated—In Danish, *Torsdag*; in Old Norse, *Thorsdag*; in German, *Donnerstag*; in Dutch, *Dondertag*, and in English, *Thursday*. These divinities here mentioned were the principal objects of worship among the old Scandinavians; but they did not all agree amongst themselves about the preference which was due to each of them. Thus the Danes and the Anglo-Saxons seem to have paid the highest honor to Odin, the Norwegians and Icelanders to Thor, and the Swedes had chosen for their protecting divinity Frey, the husband of Freia, who presided over the seasons of the year, and bestowed fertility and health.

Baldur was another son of Odin, wise, eloquent, and endowed, say the old Sagas, with so great majesty that his very glances were

shining. *Tyr*, to be distinguished from *Thor*, was also a warrior divinity, from whom is derived the name given to the third day of the week—in Danish and Norwegian, *Tirsdag*; in German, *Dienstag*; in Anglo-Saxon, *Tyrsdag*; and English, *Tuesday*. *Bragi*, another son of *Odin*, presided over eloquence and poetry. His wife's name was *Idunna*. She had the care of certain apples, which the gods tasted when finding themselves growing old, and which had the power of instantly restoring them to youth. *Heimdall* was the doorkeeper of the gods. The gods had made a bridge between heaven and earth; this bridge was the rainbow. *Heimdall* was employed to watch this bridge for fear the giants should make use of it to get into heaven and make war upon the gods. But this *Heimdall* was, besides his office, quite a remarkable person; it was a difficult matter to surprise him, because the gods had given him the faculty of sleeping more lightly than a bird, and a ear so fine that he could hear the very grass grow, and the wool on the backs of the sheep. I suppress here the other gods who made up the number of twelve, but I must bestow a few words upon *Loki*, whom the ancient Scandinavians seem to have regarded as the serpent is regarded in the Bible. Genesis says, "The serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field, which the Lord God had made." The serpent is the evil, seducing principle. So is *Loki* in the Scandinavian mythology; but the difference is, that the Bible does not rank the serpent like a god, which the Scandinavian mythology does in respect to *Loki*, who is ranked amongst the gods. He is like a god, beautiful in his figure, but his mind is evil, and he surpasses all mortal beings in perfidy and craftiness. He continually fights with the gods, who, however, at last conquer this evil principle, and shut him up in a prison, where he remains captive till the end of the ages, when he shall be slain by *Heimdall*, the doorkeeper of the gods. Then a new earth shall spring forth from the bosom of the waves, the fields shall bring forth without culture, calamities shall be unknown, a palace is there erected more shining than the sun, all covered with gold. This is the place that the just will inhabit, and enjoy delights for evermore.

I have remarked that there were twelve gods, and the Scandinavian mythology reckons also twelve goddesses, including Frigga, the spouse of Odin, and the chief of them all. The court of the gods was ordinarily kept under a great ashtree called *Ygdrasill*. This ash is the greatest of trees; its branches cover the surface of the earth, its top reaches heaven. From under one of the roots of this tree runs a fountain, wherein wisdom is concealed, and from a neighbouring spring three virgins, young maidens, are continually drawing precious water, with which they water the ashtree. These three virgins always keep under the ashtree, and they are considered they who dispense the days and ages of men, like the three *Parcæ* or *Destinies* in the Greek mythology, who presided over human life and span it out.

But when we now advert to observing the prevailing mode of worshipping these divinities, then we find almost the same idea of these deities amongst the ancient Scandinavians as the Bible, 2d Chron. chap. 6, expresses, where Solomon says when dedicating the temple, "Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee, O God, how much less this house, which I have built," for it was at first thought offensive to the gods to pretend to inclose them within the circuit of walls. The ancient Scandinavians, therefore, worshipped first their divinities in the open air, and neither knew nor approved they of the use of temples. We find thus up to this very day here and there in Denmark, Norway and Sweden, in the middle of a plain, or upon some little hill, altars around which they assembled to offer sacrifices. But by degrees, as the Scandinavians formed new connections with the other European nations, whether by the numerous maritime expeditions they undertook, or by the foreign colonies established amongst them, their religion tolerated at length grottoes, artificial caves, which we especially find in Norway, cut with incredible pains in the hardest rocks, until they at length commenced to use temples and idols, and at length adopted them without any reserve. Their most famous temple was that at Upsal in Sweden.

The ancient Scandinavians had three religious festivals in the

year. The *first* was celebrated at the winter-solstice, and they called the night on which it was observed, the mother-night, as that which produced all the rest, and this epoch was rendered the more remarkable, as they dated from thence the beginning of the year, which, amongst the Northern nations, was computed from one winter-solstice to another, as the month was from one new moon to the next. This festival was named *Yule*, the name anciently also in England given to Christmas, and was celebrated in honour of the sun, in order to obtain a propitious year. When Christianity had been introduced, this festival was, as we know, celebrated as the birthday of our Saviour, and in England called Christmas, but the three Scandinavian nations retained the name *Yule*, which name is still used. Sacrifices, feastings, nocturnal assemblies, and all the demonstrations of a most dissolute joy were then authorized by the general custom, and they answered in their character to the Roman saturnalia. The *second* festival was instituted in honour of the *Earth*, which was considered a goddess, to request of her fertility, and this festival was fixed at the first quarter of the second moon of the year. This was the chief festival of the Swedes, during which they held their Supreme Court. The *third* festival, which seems to have been the most conspicuous, was instituted in honour of Odin, and was celebrated at the beginning of spring, in order to obtain from him, being the God of Battles, happy success in their military and maritime expeditions.

In the infancy of mankind all offerings consisted, as we know, of the fruit of the ground, and of the firstlings of the flock. We read in Genesis, chap. 4th, "In process of time it came to pass that Cain brought of the ground an offering unto the Lord, and Abel he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof." Such were also the offerings which the ancient Scandinavians brought unto their gods and goddesses, such namely as husbandmen and shepherds could present. They loaded the altars with the first fruits of their crops and with the choicest animals. Nevertheless, when they would ask for any favor which they ardently wished for, or would deprecate some public calamity

which they feared might happen, the blood of animals was not deemed sufficient, but they began to shed that of men, and this barbarous custom was not entirely abolished till towards the end of the ninth century, when they received the glorious light of the Gospel. Then they chose among the captives in time of war and among the slaves in time of peace, nine persons to be sacrificed, the bodies of which unfortunate victims were afterwards suspended in a sacred grove near the temple, of which grove every tree and every leaf was considered the most sacred thing in the world. And in a great national calamity, if the people believed that they had some pretext to impute the cause to their king, they even sacrificed him as the highest prize with which they could buy the divine favor. In this manner the first king of Vermland, a province of Sweden, was burnt in honor of Odin in order to put an end to a great famine. The kings in their turn did not spare the blood of their subjects, and many of them shed even that of their children. Thus a king of Sweden devoted to Odin the blood of his nine sons, to prevail upon Odin to prolong his life. The ceremony always concluded with feasting, by which they drank immoderately, and the kings and chiefs drank first healths in honor of the gods; every one drank afterwards, making some vow or prayer to the god whom they named, and hence came that custom amongst the first Christians in Scandinavia and Northern Germany of drinking to the health of our Saviour, the apostles and the saints, a custom which the Church was obliged, although reluctantly, for a long time to tolerate.

It was a general belief amongst the ancient Scandinavians that they easily might learn the will, inclinations and desires of their gods and their goddesses through the instrumentality of *oracles* and *divinations* like the people of olden Greece, and it was generally believed that the three virgins before mentioned, who watered the celebrated ash tree and dispensed the days and ages of men, delivered out these oracles in the respective temples. Saxo Grammaticus, the famous Danish historian of the twelfth century, tells us that it was customary amongst the Danes to consult the oracles

of those three virgins concerning the destiny of children recently born. But oracles were not the only efforts made by the ancient Scandinavians to penetrate into futurity. They had *diviners*, both male and female, honored with the name of prophets and prophetesses, and they did the same as Moses says, Deuter., chap. 18th, of some pagan nations, "They hearkened unto observers of times and unto diviners." Some of them were said to have familiar spirits, whom they consulted under the form of idols; others dragged the ghosts of the departed from their tombs. Poetry was often used for the like absurd purpose, and the Skalds or bards boasted of power to disturb the repose of the dead, and to drag them out of their graves by certain songs which they knew how to compose. The belief in this power ascribed to these skalds or bards was so engrafted in the community, that even after the introduction of Christianity the priests were considered to have inherited this power from the skalds, wherewith they, amongst the superstitious people, made a most lucrative business. Nay, even a long time after the introduction of the Lutheran Reformation, the ministers of the Gospel were believed to understand the *black art*, as this power was called, and although this imposture was, as an abomination unto the Lord, severely forbidden by the government, the ministers often clandestinely made use thereof, thereby to increase their income.

But the same superstition and ignorance which made the ancient Northern nations believe in the power of the priests to disturb the repose of the dead, and to drag them out of their graves by certain formulas and songs, persuaded them also that some letters or *runic characters*, consisting of sixteen marks, and beginning with the letter "F," the origin of which is ascribed to Odin, included in them certain mysterious and magical properties. Impostors easily made a credulous people believe that these letters, combined after a certain system, were able to work miracles and to predict future events. There were letters or runes to procure victory, to relieve women in the perils of child-birth, to soften the severity of a cruel master, and to secure fidelity to the

connubial bed. Some engraved runes on their nails to make their sweet-hearts faithful to them, some on the hilt of their swords to be successful in war, some on the helm of their ships to avoid tempest and hurricane. The same superstition induced them to lend an attentive ear to the *singing of birds*, which some sorcerers or sorceresses boasted of being able to interpret. The ancient history of Scandinavia is full of these superstitious practices, which continued a long time after the introduction of Christianity, nay, even after the introduction of the Lutheran Reformation. Upon the whole, superstition was so engrafted in the people that even men of extensive learning, whose reason was brought to the greatest perfection, and who engaged themselves in the deepest speculations, were more or less superstitious. Tycho Brahe, the celebrated Danish astronomer of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, was very superstitious, considering certain days in the year pregnant with misfortune, wherefore in Denmark, up to this very day, the laboring class call such days on which they happen to meet with some unfortunate accident, Tycho Brahe's days. He did even carry his superstition so far, that when going out in the morning his first meeting was with an old woman, he believed that something unfortunate would happen to him before the conclusion of the day.

But this superstition, however deeply rooted and engrafted, did not blind all the ancient Scandinavians without exception. History testifies that there were after all amongst them men wise enough to discover the folly of the received opinions, and courageous enough to ridicule them without reserve. In the history of the Norwegian king, Olaf Trygvesson, a warrior, did not fear to say that he placed more confidence in his own strength and in his arms, than in Odin and Thor. "I have travelled in many places," he says, "I have met with giants and monstrous men; they could never overcome me, thus to this present hour my own strength and courage are the sole objects of my belief." Rolf Krake, King of Denmark in the sixth century after Christ, said one day when one of his companions proposed to offer a sacrifice to Odin, that

he feared nothing of that blustering and swaggering spirit, and that he would never reverence him nor make sacrifices to him. Indeed we see appear at intervals men endued with a real strength of mind, who did not only trample under foot all the objects of credulity and idle superstition, but who even raised their minds to the invisible Master, the Father of the sun and of all nature. In an Icelandic chronicle, a man by the name of Giest says to his nephew, who was about to embark for the discovery of America, "I beseech and conjure Him who made the sun and the stars, to give success to thy great undertaking." But still more remarkable are the words of Harold Hairfair, the first king of all Norway in the ninth century, when Christianity had *not yet* found its way to that country, "I swear in the most sacred manner that I will never offer sacrifices to any of the gods adored by my people, but to Him only who has formed the world, and what I behold in it." To describe minutely like expressions from many wise men would only occasion tiresome repetitions, and I shall therefore, confine myself to remarking that at the end of the ninth century Christianity was introduced into the three Scandinavian kingdoms, Denmark, Norway and Sweden, the vestiges of the pagan worship were destroyed, its idols overthrown, its altars demolished, and its temples closed, and Christianity has since prevailed in Scandinavia, and formed the great bond of the social happiness and the great source of the intellectual eminence which this remote quarter of the globe now so richly enjoys.

It is scarcely necessary, I think, that I should take notice, before concluding, that I here only have been delineating a nation in its infancy, and that the greatest part of the other Europeans were neither less savage nor less uncivilized during the same period; and the great prerogative of Scandinavia, and what ought to recommend its inhabitants beyond almost every people on earth, is that they afforded the great resource to the liberty of Europe. Montesquieu, the admirable author of the Spirit of Laws, calls Scandinavia the fabric of those instruments that broke the fetters manufactured in the South, and I do not hesitate to conclude by saying

that the stalwart men who ventured upon unknown, cold and stormy seas, and at length landed on the New England shores, and who since have controlled the world's history in many things and at many times, and whose achievements in war and in letters are worthy the most heroic age of Rome and the most finished period of Greece, should be saluted with respect by all succeeding generations.